

SUNDAY BIBLE STUDY NOTES

— February 4, 2018 —

Pastor Les Smith

SERIES: Making True Disciples

SERMON: Following the Discipleship Course - Part 1

TEXT: Philippians 3:7-11

“The Joy of Relationships”

Central Message:

Last week, I emphasized the sobering reality that we cannot run this Christian race alone. We need to be in relationship with other believers who will pour their lives into us, who will occasionally “honk” encouragement when we need it, and who will hold us accountable for the commitments we have made.

Paul, in his second letter to the young preacher Timothy, a young man he had been pouring his life into, reminded his young disciple that the process started with his grandmother Lois, continued with his mother Eunice, and would culminate in his pouring his own life into other believers. This, in a nutshell, is the ***discipleship process***. Discipleship happens in the context of small groups. But, the question that remains to be answered is: “How do we have authentic, meaningful relationships with other believers?” The answer is relatively simple. If we want to have a relationship with others, that relationship has to happen in the context of an authentic relationship with Christ. So, how do we have a relationship with Christ? It begins with accepting Christ as our personal Savior and develops in four progressive and iterative steps. We first have to ***know*** Christ...not know about Him, but know Him intimately and personally. After we begin to ***know*** Christ, we

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“Knowing God and Making Him Known”

can begin to **trust** Him, and the more we **trust** Him, the more we will **love** Him. Once we know Him and trust Him and love Him, the more likely we will **obey** Him.

We essentially follow the same steps when we are building relationships with other Christians. First, we have get to know them, then we begin to trust them, and after we trust them, we can take their advice. If we try to skip a step, the whole process spins out of control. Today, our focus is on knowing Christ and knowing other believers.

Observation #1: In order to know Christ, our relationship with him has to be the highest priority in our lives. (Philippians 3:7-8)

When you choose to make your relationship with Jesus Christ the highest priority for your life, it is a decision that is made under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, and when you make this decision, your whole perspective changes. Your earthly trophies become trash, and you can never again be content with “leftovers”. Paul writes, **“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”**. (Phil. 1:21) This thought is continued in chapter 3 where he says, **“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.”** For Paul, knowing Christ was everything, and to come to that intimate knowledge he willingly gave up every other thing. If we want to have an intimate and growing relationship with Christ and other believers, that relationship has to become a top priority in our lives.

Observation #2: If you want to know Christ, you have to hunger for His presence. (Philippians 3:9)

“and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,”

For Paul, one of the most important realities of being a follower of Christ is that we are “in Him”.

Romans 8:1 tells us, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are ***in Christ Jesus.***” Romans 8:10-11 tells us, “¹⁰ If Christ is ***in you,*** though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead ***dwells in you,*** He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who ***dwells in you.***”

As followers of Christ, we have His constant presence, and that presence is not just with us...it is in us. Our task is to acknowledge that presence and appropriate His indwelling power. If we allow the presence of Christ to control our decisions and direct our lives, then we are able to lose our “selves” in a relationship with Christ and other believers. We are able to see others through His eyes and love them with His compassion, even when we don’t want to. Relationships happen in the context of small groups, but we will need the abiding presence of Christ if we expect those relationships to bear spiritual fruit.

Observation #3: If we want to know Christ, we must appropriate His resurrection power. (Philippians 3:10-11)

“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

One of the most sobering realities of the Christian life is that it is possible for a believer to have trusted Christ as Savior and yet be a “powerless Christian”. How is that possible? Let me give you a quick illustration. A man who cut wood for a living using a regular cross-cut saw bought a new power chain saw so he could cut wood more efficiently. He took his new saw into the woods and used it for a day. When

asked how he liked the new saw, his response was surprising. He said that he managed to cut only about half as much wood as before. The man who sold him the saw asked if there was a problem with the motor. The wood cutter said, “What motor?” This man had a powerful tool in his hands, but he had no idea how to appropriate its power.

Unfortunately, that is true with many believers, and it seriously hinders our ability to know Christ. We have dwelling within us the very power that raised Christ from the dead, but if we don't appropriate it, it will be of little value. In order to appropriate resurrection power, you have to do two things. First, you have to recognize that the power is there and available for your use. Once you recognize that the power is available, you put it to use by faith.

Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ.” That is the appropriation of the indwelling power of Christ. We want the power, but we do not want the cross. The other aspect of appropriating the indwelling power of Christ is that we have to be crucified with Him and we have to be willing to suffer what He suffered. We want Christ, but we do not want the cross. They are inseparable. You cannot have one without the other.

If we are going to know Christ, we must be willing to make relationship with Him the highest priority in our lives. We must commit to spending time with Him in prayer and in his word. We must practice His presence by allowing Him to be a part of every decision we make. We must give up our right to make unilateral decisions. And finally, if we are going to love like He loved and serve like He served, we have to appropriate His resurrection power. As we know Christ, we will be empowered to know and love others. That is the essence of small groups.